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ABSTRACT

It is suggested that trends in federal and state policy formation are working against the advancement of second language education in Illinois. While the passage of the Goals 2000: Educate America Act at the federal level was a positive step, legislating that foreign language be part of the core curriculum, a subsequent state policy draft excluded foreign languages from the funds and status flowing from this law. Two tentative positive steps followed, at the state level: (1) language professionals elicited assurances that the issue would be raised during the policy revision process, and (2) the state superintendent revealed that the issue had been raised. Cautious optimism is advised, based on recent positive trends in the momentum of language education within the state. Events of 1995 are chronicled and political aspects of the issue are detailed. Language teaching professionals are urged to communicate their concerns to parents as well as to state policy-makers, focusing on the exclusion of an entire area of education as an area of opportunity for students. (MSE)

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I·C·T·F·L Accents

NEWSLETTER OF THE ILLINOIS COUNCIL ON THE TEACHING OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES

VOLUME 8, NUMBER 2

One Giant Step Forward, Two Baby Steps Backward

Foreign Language Makes Headway in Spite of the Odds

By **PAUL T. GRIFFITH**
Managing Editor, I.C.T.F.L. *Accents*

IT IS NORMAL DURING THE school year that your chief concern might be on the order of "What am I going to do on Monday in my nine o'clock class." And during the summer, "How can I put some distance between myself and school so I'll be in the mood to go back by August?"

Meanwhile, however, things are happening that have nothing to do with how you spend the summer but that could definitely shape how you will feel about going back to school in the fall. Other developments-in-the-making could dictate very rigidly how and what and even if you teach on Monday at 9:00 a.m. or any other time.

I am speaking of educational policies, those positions formal and informal that determine whether money will be available for salaries and inservice or how much weight foreign language will pull when there are curriculum decisions to be made, students to be counseled, or staff to be riffed. Everyone needs to have an idea of these developments, so that we can at least identify what hit us when the time comes and possibly even fend off these blows.

So far, 1995 has presented a fitful policy procession consisting of two steps forward followed by a step or two backward, a maneuver repeated again and again. Here at mid-year, are we losing or are we gaining?

In 1994 the Congress answered our dreams by legislating that foreign language is part of the core curriculum. Yes, the *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* was decidedly a giant step forward. The step backward came in March 1995, when the State Board distributed a policy draft that would exclude foreign language from the funds and status flowing from Goals 2000.

Two tentative steps forward ensued: First, I.C.T.F.L. members who wrote to protest the disparity between national policy and the state's position paper received assurances from many citizens on the Illinois Goals 2000 Panel that the issue would be raised during the revision process. Second, State Superintendent Spagnolo responded by revealing that the Goals 2000 Panel had recommended "that the Illinois State Board of Education systematically review the State Goals for Learning and consider other areas, i.e. foreign languages."

The final chapter remains to be written; but there is reason to remain cautiously optimistic, with our ray of hope only somewhat dimmed by the fact that Members of Congress are eyeing Goals 2000 as a place to make major budget cuts.

From 1988 to 1995, about 20 new foreign language programs a year were initiated in Illinois public schools, most of them FLES, as a result of start-up funding provided by the Illinois State Board of Education. That was the one effort of the State Board that was visibly expanding the teaching of foreign languages in Illinois schools. Then at the end of the 1994-95 school year, the State Board announced the elimination of the state foreign language grants. Ironically, the Board did not take this step backward in order to "save" the modest half million dollars which had been allocated annually to these programs. The foreign language money was dumped into the block grant cauldron, where foreign language is now faced with the daunting task of competing for the funds against heavyweights like math, science, and drug education.

In this, the very year when the foreign language grants were discontinued, State Board funding for inservice training for foreign language teachers, in contrast, rose to its highest level since 1980-81. As a result, colleagues reaped the many benefits of immersion weekends, institutes, and the extraordinarily successful "Standards PLUS" conference, all supported by state dollars. We are grateful to the State

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INTERNET WORKSHOPS SECOND SERIES

Introductory and follow-up workshops are announced on pages 26-27. For these workshops, as for all foreign language conferences, institutes, and other inservice training programs announced in this newsletter, you may be able to have your fees and travel paid from Staff Development funds, provided by the State Board of Education and administered by your local district, if you teach in a K-12 public school.

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Board for responding so well to our in-service needs. We hope the Board continues to take positive steps like this one.

Also in 1995, Chicago Public Schools initiated a policy study that would recommend a foreign language requirement for the city's 409,000 public school students. It is very encouraging to think of the impact such a decision by the state's largest and most visible school district could have on educational policy.

In fact, the year in general opened on a highly encouraging note. As early as January 9, State Superintendent Spagnolo announced that his office was including foreign language in the project to develop academic standards. After ten years of lobbying, foreign language had become a full participant in a state-level curriculum and policy project that also includes math, science, social sciences, and other subjects of the core curriculum. We officially celebrated this welcome step on the front page of *Accents*, vol. 8, no. 1 (March 1995).

By early June 1995, however, I.C.T.F.L. members who had written to commend the State Board began receiving letters in which the State Superintendent cast some gloom over our enthusiasm. The Superintendent stated that the foreign language standards were being developed only as a reference for the local schools to take or to leave, as they pleased. The reason he gave was that foreign language "is not currently a Fundamental Learning Area mandated by the Illinois State Board of Education."

Did you notice the Superintendent said, "not currently"? Is it permitted to read any hope into those two words, a hint that one day foreign language may be considered?

Conclusions

To come to the real point of this editorial, let us return to the instance of Illinois Goals 2000 policy draft. Illinois Council's reaction to this document is our most recent and most promising public information effort to date. The incident illustrates a major problem in public policy development. It also suggests where a potentially very productive course of action may lie.

The State Board document concerned, *Goals 2000: Illinois State Improvement Plan for Education*, expressed commendable aspirations to a "world-class education" for Illinois, one that would produce citizens who understand other ethnic groups in "our diverse society" and who are equipped with the skills they need to succeed in the "global work force." Such references to the importance of international understanding, cross-cultural communication, and "our global society" in the document were in fact numerous and quite sincere. Yet the text clearly ruled out foreign languages as an important component of the curriculum. No need to learn languages and cultures in order to understand or communicate or act responsibly in multi-cultural and international settings, said the document—curiously—to any perceptive reader.

What is truly revealing is that not one of the persons involved in the development of the draft detected its glaring internal inconsistency. Not the 57 distinguished representatives of the general public who make up the Illinois Goals 2000 Panel, not the curriculum and policy specialists employed by the State Board, nor any of the Board's army of writers, proofreaders, managers, and public relations watchdogs whose job it is to look out for such mistakes. None of them, apparently, perceived it as contradictory to speak glowingly of "international," "cross-cultural," "communicative," and "global" objectives in one breath, and in the next to advocate teaching *every* subject in the core *except* foreign language.

The case clearly illustrates that the general public understands very poorly what foreign language education is all about. They seriously lack awareness of the content, purposes, interrelations, and merits of the foreign language curriculum. The episode clearly defines one of the major tasks before the foreign language teaching profession at this moment: to educate the general public about the nature and importance of foreign language learning.

We need to find more convincing ways to tell the general public and the decision-makers that Illinois will never achieve a "world-class" education system as long as the state persists in its linguaphobic educational policy. Because every other country in this WORLD does teach languages to its young and has been perfectly comfortable with that policy for generations now.

Likewise, we must help the General Assembly to see that a major key to economic development, both in domestic and world markets, is a work force equipped with language and other international skills. Legislators must be made aware that an increasing number of states—unlike Illinois—are taking a step that will position them for success in this era of GAAT and NAFTA and a culturally diverse society. They are doing this by making foreign language part of the core curriculum. Many of

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FALL CONFERENCE PREVIEW

A look ahead at the I.C.T.F.L. Fall Conference begins on page 17. For this conference, as for all foreign language workshops, institutes, and other inservice training programs announced in this newsletter, you may be able to have your fees and travel paid from Staff Development funds, provided by the State Board of Education and administered by your local district, if you teach in a K-12 public school. Make application through your principal or superintendent.

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these are states with which Illinois frequently compares itself in such areas as income from world exports, volume of international tourism, and growth of ethnic populations. States as diverse as Ohio, Florida, New York, Oregon, Hawaii, North Carolina, Louisiana, Texas, California, Oklahoma, Arizona, Montana, and Arkansas have made it state policy to increase their resources for economic development. They have done so by adopting policies that enable and encourage their citizens to learn languages.

To the parents, the foreign language profession must say in no uncertain terms, "Your school district is *depriving* your sons and daughters if it does not provide them with the opportunity to develop language skills. Your child may not want to become a physicist, but her school district certainly does not have a policy *against* preparing her to follow that pursuit: she begins math and science in kindergarten and can continue those studies through her senior year. Your child may not become a novelist, but the school makes sure he has the basis for doing so, if he wishes, by developing his reading and writing skills from the primary years through grade twelve. Only a handful of privileged public schools provide comparable opportunities for foreign language study in Illinois. Sadly, existing state policy fosters that kind of inequality of access in education!

The profession brilliantly met the challenge to create and implement language proficiency testing. The profession currently is putting the finishing touches on academic standards for foreign language at the state and national levels. One of the next major challenges is to mount an effective and sustained public information campaign that educates all publics—parents and students, business and industry, taxpayers and decision-makers— about the advantages of foreign language study.

In that regard, I am pleased that Illinois Council has been asked to participate in the first statewide endeavor to address this challenge—specifically, to develop posters, brochures, and other materials to promote foreign language learning. It is significant that this project will be funded by the Illinois State Board of Education. Certainly another step in the right direction. Details on this project, which starts mid-July, will be found at the bottom of this page.

Now, in this bruising game of "Mother, May I?" what is the mid-year score? After many a baby or giant step forward or backward, foreign language does seem to be a few inches further along—but with still quite a distance to go.

A major part of the solution appears to be to modify public perceptions. This, in turn, provides a role for each member of the profession. For all of us talk with parents, students, and school administrators. All of us are represented by a member of the General Assembly who seeks to please us, and everyone can write to members of the State Board and its various advisory groups. And we all know compelling reasons why language study needs to be offered in the schools and why students should be encouraged to study it. Put those factors together, and you have a grassroots advocacy campaign that can operate every day of the year. ■

An Invitation to the Advocacy "Think Tank"

IDEAS GALORE ARE NEEDED FOR POSTERS and brochures to encourage the study of foreign languages, as part of a new and much needed project funded by the Illinois State Board of Education. All readers are urged to mail or fax their ideas by July 10 to the director of the advocacy project:

Waunita Kinoshita
805 East Florida Avenue
Urbana, Illinois 61801
Fax: 217/384-3532

These ideas will be reviewed and evaluated by a "think tank" composed of I.C.T.F.L. members and others who are experts in advertising and graphic design on July 14-15, 1995, in Urbana, Illinois. The most promising proposals will be developed into actual promotional materials, which will be distributed early in the coming school year.

If you would like to be a member of the "think tank" and can attend the meeting at Jumer's Castle Lodge in Urbana, with major expenses paid, beginning with dinner on Friday, July 14, and continuing until late afternoon on Saturday, July 15, please indicate your availability when you send your ideas for posters and brochures.

If you are chosen, you will receive an official invitation and additional information. But remember, everyone's help is needed in coming up with lots of advocacy concepts to start with.